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The Effect of Pets and Nature on Environmental Identity and Connection to Animals

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The Effect of Animals on Connection to the Environment
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Introduction
Because we are facing a multitude of environmental issues, it is vital to discover how to strengthen human connections with nature (Koger & Winter, 2010). Previous research has found that exposure to nature—whether through time spent in natural settings or through exposure to animals—is associated with increased identification with nature and pro-environmental behaviors (Myers & Saunders, 2002; Paul & Serpell, 1993; Vining, 2003). The goal of this study was to
- replicate findings that childhood pet ownership is positively correlated with environmental identity
- determine whether connection to nature could be manipulated through exposure to an animal and/or the outdoors

Method
• Participants
  • 138 undergraduate students
  • 83.3% owned pets
• Procedure:
  • Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in an online study.
  • After viewing one of four brief videos, participants completed the measures.

Results
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Had pet as child</th>
<th>Did not own pet</th>
<th>t(132)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EID</td>
<td>3.38 (.55)</td>
<td>2.88 (.70)</td>
<td>3.59**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACS</td>
<td>3.62 (.60)</td>
<td>3.08 (.77)</td>
<td>3.55**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p<.01

Discussion
• Results support our hypotheses that people who owned pets during childhood would:
  • Report higher environmental identity
  • Report greater connectedness to animals
• Experimental manipulations yielded:
  • significant effects for mood
    • Overall, the presence of an animal led to a greater increase in mood
    • The animal had a greater effect inside compared with outside
  • No significant impact for location
• No significant effects for location or animal for neither environmental identity nor connectedness to animals.

• Interpretation
  • Animals have a positive effect on people
    • Childhood experiences may have long-lasting consequences with animals playing a role in EID and connectedness to animals
    • Animals may have a positive short-term effect on mood
• Why didn’t location have an impact?
  • Demographics
  • EID measure – trait versus state
  • Differences between videos
  • Video versus true interaction
  • Videos were brief

• Future research:
  • Ensure equivalency across videos (e.g. film on green screen
  • True interaction versus video